

Salvation Comes To El Salvador

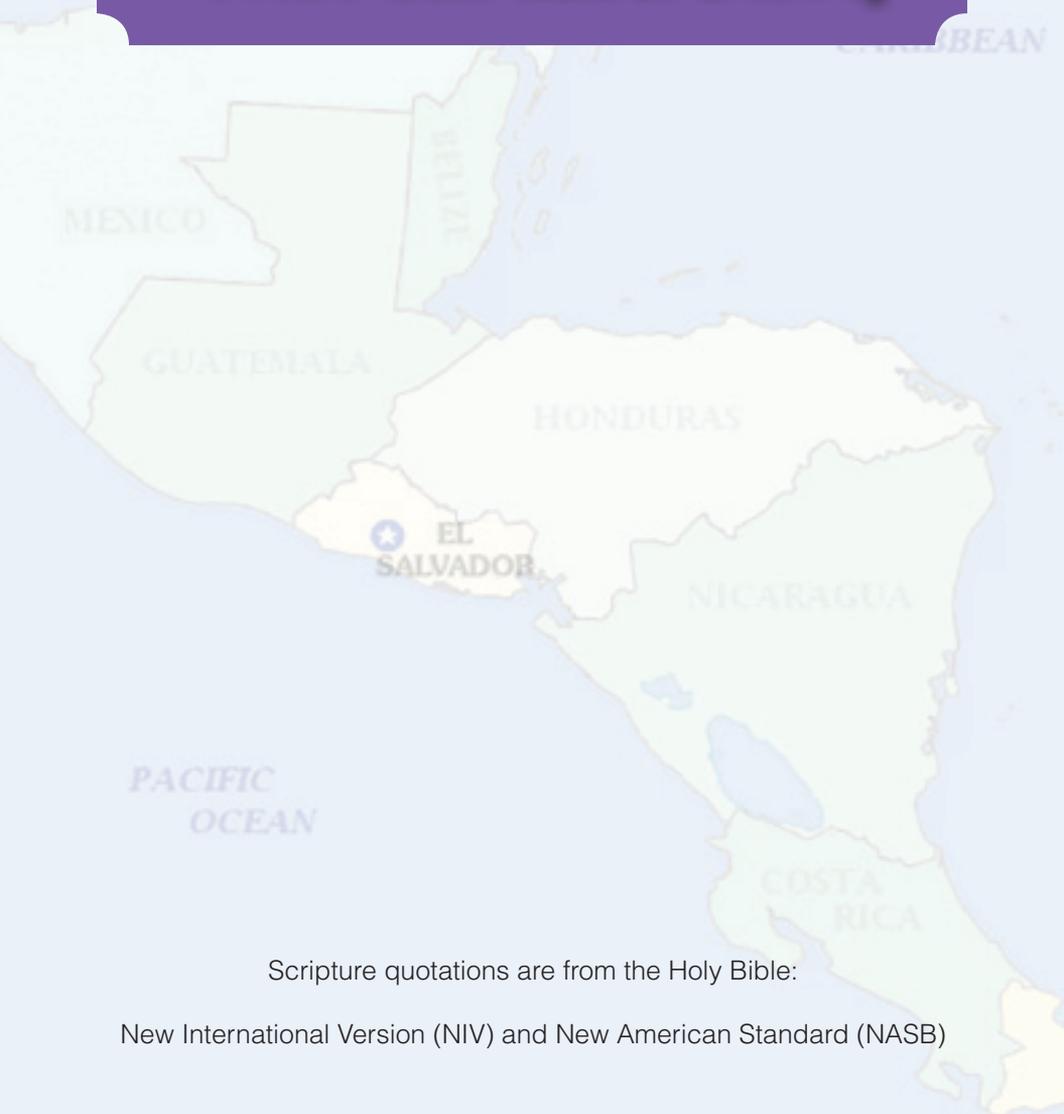
THE ALEX LARA STORY



“Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them.”

Ps. 111:2

The Alex Lara Story



Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible:

New International Version (NIV) and New American Standard (NASB)

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PREFACE

Based out of Clearwater, Florida, S.O.S. Ministries is an incorporated, non-profit, tax-exempt Christian organization. The very nature of the acronym of S.O.S. states our mission: Seekers Of Souls. We are committed to seeking after lost souls and making them disciples of Jesus.

For it was said of Jesus, “That the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his people and to the Gentiles.” (Acts 26:23) Seeking after the lost and **proclaiming His light** to a lost world has become our vision and passion in following our Savior’s example. Though the Lord is the one who convicts, draws and saves, He has called all believers to seek out the lost and bear witness to His message of redemption. As echoed in the words of Paul in the book of Romans, we too desire to have “beautiful feet”.

“And how can they believe ... without someone preaching to them. And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

Romans 10: 14-15



Dedicated to:

My wife, Sandy. May the Lord God Almighty be glorified with your love and service for Him. Rich is your reward in heaven!

A NAME WITH A MEANING

“...Apart from Me there is no savior.” Is. 43:11

The Scriptures are true that “salvation is found in no one else” other than Jesus. How appropriate then should it be that Salvation would come to El Salvador? Snuggled into the heart of Central America on the Pacific Ocean, this country actually bears the name of the One who brought salvation to the world. The literal translation of “El Salvador” to English is “The Savior.” With over 6 million people residing in El Salvador, a majority live in



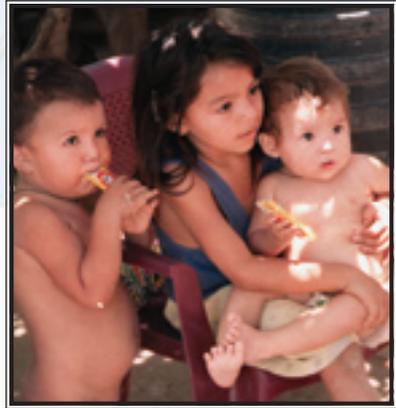
One of many volcanoes in
El Salvador

extreme poverty conditions. Not only are they in desperate need of help due to their poverty stricken economy, but they are also in need of the grace of our Lord Jesus. For it is said of Jesus “that though He was rich yet for our sakes He became poor, so that through His poverty we might become rich.” (II Cor. 8:9) This is a story of how “rich” in the Lord one El Salvadoran man became who lives in a poverty stricken village, and how God used him to set his province ablaze with the Gospel message of Christ.

FOR A NOBLE CAUSE

“...He will be an instrument for noble purposes...” II Tim. 2:21

While working as a medical health worker for a clinic in Rosario De La Paz, Alex Lara was awarded a scholarship for a higher education in medicine. Only a few are chosen to be recipients of this program. With the desire to help his people more, Alex came to Clearwater, Florida, leaving behind his wife, a 2-month-old baby, and a country that is in desperate need of human relief. Joining a group of 19 other Central American rural health workers, Alex was immersed in concentrated studies that would better equip him for the task of ministering medically to his fellow countrymen.



The Need for missions as seen through the eyes of children

OPEN DOORS FOR S.O.S. MINISTRIES

“...What He opens no one can shut...” Rev. 3:7

The Lord opened a door for S.O.S. Ministries at a public college in Clearwater, Florida. S.O.S. was invited to work with International Students by one of the school’s administrators and was granted permission to teach these students in an ESL (English as a Second Language) class. The teaching class would primarily be done through the use of a classroom on campus with permission even extending to

use the Bible as part of the curriculum. Since this group of students assigned to the scholarship program were from Latin America (Spanish speaking), S.O.S. was able to introduce a Spanish/English Bible. Alex Lara was one of those students.

Imagine the Scenario: A non-profit Christian ministry inside a classroom of a public college tutoring a group of foreign students in English. All the students, using Spanish/English Bibles and John 3:16 plastered on the blackboard, were being taught in English what it means to believe in the only Son of God for salvation.

“Making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”

Eph. 5:16

BEFRIENDING A FOREIGNER

“The alien living with you must be treated as one of your own. Love him as yourself.” Lev. 19:34

The dictionary describes a foreigner as one who is from another country, and regarded as an outsider or stranger. These foreign students have a very difficult time adjusting to the American culture due to their diverse cultural backgrounds. Being removed from their families, friends, and their whole way of life made them perfect candidates for friendship. As a result of this unique ministry that began in a classroom, a local church (Lakeside Community Chapel) reached out and befriended these International Students. In loving these students both in word and deed, relationships were built that would last a lifetime. The initial 20 Latin Americans were eager to

make new friends and receive assistance from those who were willing to provide it.

Alex excelled in learning the English language so he became the spokesman and leader for the group. However, just because one can speak the language does not mean one understands the entire culture. For example, Alex had to be shown how to use a dishwasher. He neglected to use the one in his apartment because he did not know how to operate it. The appliance was totally foreign to him because his home, like many in Rosario De La Paz, does not have running water. Without running water, there is no need for dishwashers.

BEARING FRUIT THAT WILL LAST

“...I chose you... to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.” John 15:16

Who was to know that these students would desire to learn more outside the classroom due to the open door of using the Bible as part of the curriculum? Monday and Thursday Bible studies were started at their apartments, and one by one the Lord began to open their eyes to the truth of His Word. A couple of them even expressed an immediate desire to be baptized as a result of their newfound faith. However, Alex was not one of them, well, not initially. He was dealing with a number of issues that were clouding his understanding of the true gospel message of Jesus Christ, preventing him from putting his faith and trust in the only One who can save. The issues consisted of family dilemmas at home in El Salvador, questions about why he had to live in such a poverty stricken place while people in the U.S. lived so “luxuriously”, and ultimately, his biggest reservation: he understood

the Scriptures enough to know that if he was to truly become a believer in Christ, he would have to surrender his life, as well as his life style to the Lord, including being obedient to proclaiming this message to others. He was considering the cost of becoming a disciple of Jesus (Luke 14:25-35). Within a few weeks of his inner wrestling, Alex believed in, surrendered to, and submitted himself to Christ. He began to immediately bear fruit in the name of the One he now called Lord and Savior.

One must understand that the idea of “making disciples” out of foreigners is very strategic. They are evangelized and discipled into becoming “indigenous missionaries”. An “indigenous missionary” can be defined as a person (believer) who is a native to their own country (already knowing the culture, language, etc.) and who will make it their goal to “make disciples” out of their own countrymen. This process opens the door for the gospel message of Jesus Christ to enter different countries, even the countries that restrict or forbid any kind of Christian influence or outside mission efforts. What a great strategy!

THE RETURN HOME

“He who goes out weeping... will return with songs of joy...” Ps. 126:6

There is an expression that is used in the English language that describes the feeling of what came next for Alex: “all good things must come to an end.” His studies were complete. It was time for him and the other medical students to return to their respective countries. They would be leaving behind the conveniences of the U.S.:

air conditioning/heater, fast food restaurants, opportunities to earn 90% more in their job market, American friendships, faith maturing Bible studies, indoor plumbing, electricity, apartments fully loaded with all major appliances (yes, even the dishwasher), and furniture.

Words cannot describe the sober and downcast face that Alex had as the college van drove him and the others to the airport. Once inside the airport terminal, few words were exchanged as the airline attendant called for all passengers to board the plane. A short prayer was offered up, and a wishful desire to see each other again was mumbled under our breaths.

It was not exactly like pulling teeth to get Alex on the airplane, but rather getting him past the hard stuck reality of going back to a country that is barren and desolate with economic



A poor family on Alex's Medical route

poverty. Even though the picture did not look pleasant, the good news was that he would return home with his eternal destination forever changed.

THE SEPTEMBER 1st PHONE CALL

“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.” Phil. 1:6

Believers in Christ have numerous opportunities to trust and put their faith in the promises of Scriptures. One such promise is Phil. 1:6 as mentioned above. Would Alex be faithful in allowing the Lord, who had

begun such a great work in his life in the states, to continue to use him in bringing the work to it's completion in his homeland? The ringing



An exchange of friendship with the Mayor of Rosario

of a phone and the conversation that followed would ease the uncertainty and concern that was felt for Alex's future. It was Alex. During the conversation he relayed that upon his return home, in his boldness and excitement, he went to the mayor of the city seeking permission to

invite a group of Americans to come to Rosario and help him proclaim the gospel message of Christ that forever changed his life. Permission was granted. A public format would be set up in front of his entire city. Rosario would never be the same.

Imagine the Scenario: a medical student who received a higher education in medicine and learned a second language, returned home a respected man by his countrymen, especially the officials. So when he went to the mayor with his request, permission was immediately granted (by the grace and will of God). This took place less than 2 months after Alex returned to his homeland. Little did S.O.S. know that this message of Hope that changed Alex Lara's life in the U.S., would bring about salvation to many of his family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors and countrymen.

THE FIRST MISSION TRIP DOWN SOUTH!

“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” John 20:21

On receiving a fax from the Mayor giving permission to come and bring Christian material to El Salvador, a mission team was formed. Eight people from Lakeside Community Chapel and 3 foreign, Spanish speaking missionaries on furlough committed in going on this first pioneer trip. So with faxed paper in hand as the legal document for customs, suitcases full of Bibles, as well as other Christian literature, and eleven excited believers trusting in the Lord, the team embarked on December 11, 2000 to El Salvador.



The First team in
El Salvador

Our purpose was to evangelize with the ultimate goal of planting churches. Less than 24 hours after flying into El Salvador, we were standing in front of the mayor and his entire staff proclaiming Christ crucified and resurrected. The following day we were standing in front of the entire city of Rosario. Using various means and methods of evangelizing in the days that would follow, we worked along side Alex in an endeavor to reach his fellow countrymen. As a result of the outreach, people were believing and turning to the Lord. However, there would still be many villages left needing to be reached with the Gospel.

Miraculously, the Lord put us in contact with a national missionary, Pastor Jimenez, who was also praying for help in the effort of reaching his people. Although he lived in the same province as Alex, they did not know each other. The Lord is the one who ordains His plans to come to fruition.

Glory to His Name!

CHURCH PLANTING EFFORTS UNDERWAY!

“Jesus said, ‘I will build my church.’ ” Matt. 16:18

Exactly one month from the initial trip, an earthquake rocked El Salvador leaving hundreds dead and thousands homeless. The devastated victims included our dear brother Alex and many of Rosario’s citizens. This earthquake actually destroyed 91 out of the 98 mud and stick homes in one particular village. The devastation

gave S.O.S. Ministries a great opportunity to put its “title” into practice and its faith into action in ministering to our brother in need. (“If anyone has material possessions and see his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love



Bible teaching in a small village

of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” I John 3:17-18) A second team



Worship service at Alex’s house

was formed for this mission of mercy. This time we would be taking tents, medical supplies, and construction materials. This act of love and compassion had far reaching effects in our church planting endeavors.

Other trips would soon follow and allow further training and discipleship for Alex, Pastor Jimenez, and other potential church leaders. We were also able to supply more

Spanish Christian literature for their use.

We started leadership development conferences in an area where there are no Bible schools or seminaries. We came along side these leaders in an ongoing ministry to the greater Rosario area; reaching out to small villages such as El Pardon, Amatepe, and El Angelos (as well as others). Alex has already been an effective tool for Christ with his medical route which takes him into remote villages. He has not only been able to provide physical help, but spiritual as well. Some of these villages are now having Bible studies. We were even able to provide “Christmas” for over 600 poor children in remote villages. What a great blessing it is to see such “fruit” in a fellow laborer in Christ!

Acts 14:21-25 depicts how Paul would go into lost cities and evangelize, disciple new believers, train men to be elders in the church and then commending and committing these men to the Lord. Then he went on to the next city and the next. S.O.S. has chosen to use this example to shepherd the Lord’s ministry in El Salvador, as well as other countries.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

“The people living in darkness have seen a great light.” Matt. 4:16

In retrospect, S.O.S. Ministries has come full circle in obtaining its’ goals with our first International Student, Alex Lara: to befriend and meet the needs of, to evangelize and make disciples of, to go on mission trips to visit and encourage, and plant new churches.

Praise the Lord!

S.O.S. has ultimately adopted Jesus' strategy as found in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive the power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This was the final command that the Lord gave to His disciples before He ascended into heaven. By witnessing to Alex in our hometown "Jerusalem", it took us to the remote places of the world. One must understand that when people become believers in the Lord, they are filled with the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that gives all believers the power and strength to be His witnesses in order to obey the command to go evangelize and disciple people wherever their hometown "Jerusalem" may be.



The 20 original Latin American medical workers dressed in their traditional attire

Who will be the next "Alex" to bring Glory to God by returning to their country with their newfound faith, ready to set their province ablaze with the life-changing message of Jesus Christ?



Alex, his wife Maria, and their children

“But if I say, ‘I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,’ his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot!”

Jer. 20:9

A product of:



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